

THE GREAT RUSSIAN PIANO TRADITION: SELECTED REPERTOIRE BY  
TCHAIKOVSKY, RACHMANINOFF AND PROKOFIEV

by

Alexandru Timofeev

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts  
2012

Advisory Committee:

Professor Larissa Dedova, Chair  
Professor Cleveland Page  
Professor Rita Sloan  
Mr. Donald Manildi  
Professor Kira Gor

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE GREAT RUSSIAN PIANO TRADITION:  
SELECTED REPERTOIRE BY TCHAIKOVSKY,  
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Alexandru Timofeev, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2012

Dissertation directed by: Professor Larissa Dedova  
School of Music

This dissertation explores representative piano music by three great Russian composers: Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev. The areas of research include: 1) the short character piece; 2) the Russian piano transcription tradition; 3) the concerto and sonata cycle; 4) extra-musical imagery; 5) the influence of popular and dance music of the period. Perhaps the most important result of this research is learning how the art of incorporating a singing quality at the piano stands at the center of Russian pianistic heritage.

The first recital features compositions by Sergei Prokofiev. The *Seventh Sonata* exhibits rebellious, uncompromisingly dissonant treatment of its musical content. *Ten Pieces from "Cinderella"* shows an ascetic approach to piano texture - a common characteristic in Prokofiev's late works. The *Third Concerto* is Prokofiev's masterpiece in the genre. One of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most performed concerti, it overflows with pianistic challenges.

For my second dissertation recital, I have chosen Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*. These short character pieces were inspired by literary sources. The text portrays Russian rural life, nature, moments of intimate reflection, and imaginary experiences and impressions. Tchaikovsky's gift as a melodist and remarkable musical individualist is represented in his two *Nocturnes* as well as in the *Nutcracker Suite*, masterfully transcribed by Mikhail Pletnev.

The final program features Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Ten Preludes, Op. 23*, regarded as a culmination of the turn-of-the-century grand Russian pianistic style. The *Fantasy Pieces* helped establish Rachmaninoff's reputation as a pianist-composer, a profoundly lyrical poet of the piano. The three Rachmaninoff transcriptions, the *Minuet*, the *Hopak* and the *Polka de W.R.* preserve the spirit of the Golden Era's musical salon. These pieces were written to delight and dazzle audiences with their bold character, musical taste, virtuosic tricks and technical finesse.

The three recitals comprising this dissertation were presented in Gildenhorn Recital at the University of Maryland School of Music on November 13, 2010, April 11, 2011 and February 27, 2012. The recitals were recorded on compact discs and are archived within the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

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